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**Dancing The Texas-Two Step Backwards: The Public Policy Legacy of
Ann Richards**

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Ann Richards**

by

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Report

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Dedication

No one grows up in Texas without learning about Ann Richards. Richards carried an air of invincibility about her. Many remember her as reckless, nearly wild. Her name and the idea of a political glass ceiling are inextricably tied. Her accomplishments as a politician and a public servant paved the way for women all over the country to achieve new levels of political success. This is for Ann and all of the other Texas women who have left us with legacies of feminism, friendship, and recklessness so that we may have something to aspire to.

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Abstract

Dancing The Texas Two-Step Backwards: The Public Policy Legacy of Ann Richards

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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Abstract: Ann Richards, the 45th Governor of the State of Texas, is the only woman to be elected to the Governor's Office in Texas. In addition to holding the governorship, Richards also served as Travis County Commissioner and State Treasurer. Richards established herself as a champion for women and made a name for herself by opening up government to ordinary people, taking on the well-established good ol' boys in politics, and generally raising hell. This report examines her life, public service, policies, and her legacy, which has yet to be finished.

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Chapter One: Legacy in the Making

Ann Richards was most known for her singular term as Governor of Texas from 1991 through 1995, self-identified as a hell-raiser. According to accounts of family members and fellow policy makers, she was born that way. In a time when Texas government was a strange combination of conservative and secular, she pushed policy making to its limits, often surrounded by a group of strong-minded feminists that included Jane Hickie, Suzanne Coleman, Mary Beth Rogers, Molly Ivins, and Liz Carpenter. She held three elected offices in Texas- Travis County Commissioner, Texas Treasurer, and Governor. She was the second woman to hold the highest office in Texas but is considered the only woman to have won it in her own right because Miriam “Ma” Ferguson, the first woman to hold the office nearly sixty years before Richards, was pulled into the role after her husband James E. “Pa” Ferguson was impeached for misapplication of public funds and accepting bribes.

EARLY LIFE

Ann Richards was born Dorothy Ann Willis on September 1, 1933 in Lakeview, Texas, which is now part of Lacy Lakeview. She was the only child of Mildred Iona Warren and Robert Cecil Willis and was born during the toughest years of the Great Depression. The Willis family moved to Waco after a brief two-year stint in San Diego when Ann was beginning high school and laid down roots. Ann strived to be a model student and was an active participant in Girls State, then called Girls Nation. Girls State

took her on her first trip to Washington D.C. where she shook President Harry Truman's hand in the White House Rose Garden. Later in life, Richards often expressed how important Girls State and the opportunity to engage in political debate at an early age was to her.

Ann graduated from Waco High School in 1950 and attended Baylor University on a Debate Team scholarship and earned a bachelor's degree. She lived at home throughout college at the insistence of her mother, although she took occasional weekend trips to Austin to see her boyfriend and future husband David "Dave" Richards who was studying at The University of Texas at the time. David eventually transferred to Baylor for his junior year and Ann quit the debate team and gave up her scholarship to spend more time with him. They got married in 1953 and graduated from Baylor in 1954. They moved to Austin after David was admitted to The University of Texas Law School. Ann acquired a teaching certificate in 1955 while David found law school boring but politics more and more fun.

POLITICAL BEGINNINGS

Dallas

When Ann and David lived in their first house in Dallas, they were part of a very small handful of liberal Democrats for miles around. Ann had already given birth to her first daughter, Cecile, and spent most of her time puzzling over the demands of being a mother and a housewife, which she eventually grasped but never settled into. Ann and David were very involved with the Young Democrats and periodically took trips to

Austin to catch up with friends. After Ann's second child, Dan, was born, they moved to a larger house in Dallas and met their best friends, Virginia and Sam Whitten.

In those days, Ann spent most of her spare time being politically active in the only ways a woman in her position could. Kennedy was running for President and the Johnson "machine" had long been deemed unstoppable in Texas. Ann thought Kennedy charismatic and an idealist, and did everything she could to help his campaign including handing out bumper stickers, volunteering at the campaign headquarters, and arranging the disbursement of yard signs. She knew the assignments were menial, but she was determined to keep moving forward. She gave birth to her third child, Clark, in 1962 and soon after joined the North Dallas Democratic Women, a group of like-minded women who understood her frustration in being looked down on by the men in the party.

In the span of two years, Kennedy was assassinated; LBJ had taken office and was launching a fierce campaign for reelection against Barry Goldwater. Ann's fourth and last pregnancy became complicated when she was diagnosed with epilepsy. Ellen, Ann's fourth and last child, was delivered safely, and Anne proceeded to spend the better part of three decades ignoring her epilepsy.

By 1969, Ann and David decided they could no longer tolerate Dallas and made plans for moving to Austin. Ann made a promise to herself to stay out of politics and campaigns once they had settled into Austin life, which she kept for only two years.

Austin

Richards met Sarah Weddington in 1972, a young lawyer who wanted to run for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. Ann once said, “I don’t think I had been around any women who I would call out-and-out feminist activists until I met Sarah.” Weddington wanted to pass legislation to make the firing of schoolteachers for getting pregnant illegal, end the practice of putting women on trial for their character after sexual assault, rather than putting their assailants on trial for assault, and enact legislation that would allow women to establish credit in their own names. Richards, who was more than a dozen years older than Weddington, signed on to be her campaign manager.

Weddington had no political experience, but she had a crafty group of women around her. Weddington and Richards soon realized the largest group of employees in Austin was the non-faculty staff at the University of Texas, most of whom had not had a pay raise in years. Weddington appealed to them and won her race easily. After Weddington’s victory Richards took another position on a campaign for Bill Hobby who was running for lieutenant governor. Ann initially had poor opinions of Hobby and supported him more out of devotion to the Democratic Party than any true belief in his character, but their paths stayed close and he became a true friend, supporter, and great mentor to Richards when her own political career took off. Hobby won his race in 1972 and assumed office in January of 1973. Sarah Weddington took on her landmark case *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The uproar in the women’s movement was fascinating to Ann and she had a wonderful vantage point from which to watch it unfold. Although unsure of her feelings about feminism and the women’s movement, Richards believed in Weddington

and became her Chief of Staff until she decided to run for Travis County Commissioner in 1975.

TRAVIS COUNTY COMMISSIONER (ELECTED 1976, REELECTED 1980)

David Richards turned down the opportunity to run for Travis County Commissioner when propositioned by fellow Democrats in 1975. Eyes immediately began to look to Ann and word spread like wildfire through the liberal circles in Austin. Although it took more than a little nudging from the members of her inner circle and a fair bit of number crunching to convince her, Richards decided to run and brought on Jane Hickie to manage her campaign. Hickie was an intense, highly educated, and organized woman who would have made a formidable lawyer had she not developed such devotion to Ann.

Richards won the election for Travis County Commissioner in 1976 and was reelected in 1980. She had her work cut out for her during her six years in office. She was all of a sudden responsible for more than 500 miles of county roadways experiencing an increasing amount of traffic. She raised support to increase her budget by \$150,000. Expenditures and oversight regarding sanitation inspections, loose dog pickups, dog-bite investigations, air and water pollution sample collection, rodent removal, and appointments for the Child Welfare Board were also on her plate. With the support of Governor Dolph Briscoe, the Austin-Travis County Mental Health Mental Retardation Center - now Austin Travis County Integral Care - was founded. Richards took a great

deal of pride in her assistance in developing Travis County Services for the Deaf and protecting the budget of Child Protective Services.

New Lieutenant Governor Hobby asked Richards to sit on a committee to examine the state's delivery of human services. Richards undertook a project to assess the state's failure to steer minors away from what we now call the "school-to-prison pipeline." Fielding the problem of the old Travis County jail, which was literally falling down and falling apart in a hazardous manner, fell under that committee's jurisdiction, but there was so much work to be done and so many hiccups along the way that the new jail did not open until 1986.

Amongst all of the issues Ann was facing as Commissioner, development, and the clash between environmentalists and developers, outshone every other issue of the day. Those who were desperate to develop Mopac, a local highway on the west side of Austin, came head to head with an organization called Save Our Springs (SOS), which is still active in Austin today, and was a major power in Travis County politics in the early 1980s. Ann straddled the line between the two groups adeptly. She was committed to protecting the water quality, the beauty of Austin's natural resources, and the Hill Country, while finding less politically charged approaches to development. One such approach was the commissioning of the iconic Austin 360 Bridge across Lake Travis, which won the Excellence in Highway Design competition of the Federal Highway Administration in 1984, and was the result of a strategic compromise between Richards, developers, and environmentalists.

THE PERSONAL, PRIVATE, AND PUBLIC

As the 1970s came to a close and Richards was looking towards a second term as Travis County Commissioner, she found herself in a marriage that was quickly deteriorating and a drinking problem that seemed determined to spiral out of control. Richards had qualms about diving into politics before her run for Travis County Commissioner. The thought of a high-profile career and distinct change in lifestyle had made Richards hesitant to run, and her life's course seemed to be turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

David Richards and Jane Hickie decided an intervention to address Ann's alcoholism was necessary in 1980 before she began a second term in office. David was reluctant and required some heavy encouragement from friends before agreeing to participate. The intervention ended as most do, with hurt feelings and anger on Ann's part and a deeper concern for her well being from everyone else.

Richards agreed to attend a rehabilitation facility in Minneapolis and felt good about her new sobriety upon leaving, but was fearful of returning to Austin to face a failing marriage and a broken family. David and Ann tried to hold on as long as possible for their four children but separated after the holidays in 1980. Ann began the journey of finding peace in solitude, which she did through the help of supportive friends and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. However, her history with alcohol and drugs did not dissipate because she found sobriety.

Although her alcoholism did not prevent her from holding more public offices, it came up again and again in the media. Despite the reality that she was not alone and Bob

Bullock, George W. Bush, and most of the political opponents she would face off with had also engaged in illicit drug use and held onto drinking habits, hers was considered particularly unsavory because she was a woman. What was considered normal, understandable even, for the good ol' boys made her appear unbalanced and out of control.

STATE TREASURER (ELECTED 1982, REELECTED 1986)

In 1980, Warren Harding was the State Treasurer of Texas and planning a campaign to be Governor. A corruption scandal dashed those dreams and Bob Armstrong, the Democratic Land Commissioner, thought Richards should run for the Treasurer position because Democrats would not risk having an embarrassment like Harding on the ticket, and it seemed time for a woman to take a statewide office.

Richards later recalled thinking Armstrong's proposal was the dumbest thing she had ever heard, but unbeknownst to her, Armstrong had been working the phones, and calls from friends urging her to run immediately came pouring in. Liz Carpenter, LBJ's former executive assistant, was the first to encourage her. Richards could already identify some problems, the first being that she was not at all sure what the treasury did. Her second problem was one of timing. The deadline for filing to run was two days from the day she received the phone call from Bob Armstrong, and Texas law clearly states that an elected county official must resign their position *before* running for statewide office. The third issue was financial. Ann was not wealthy and was barely making enough money as Travis County Commissioner to support herself. She did not even have a credit card in

her own name. After hearing a suggestion, that may have been a joke, from John Rogers that she should attempt to raise \$200,000 in twenty four hours and run if she succeeded she decided to give it a shot despite her reservations. So she called friends and family, and a long list of them - including Bob Armstrong, Bob Bullock, and Bill Hobby - made it happen.

The feminists surrounding Ann launched her campaign with remarkable passion. Suzanne Coleman, who was writing research memos at the time, began writing speeches and became the best speechwriter of her generation by most accounts. Jane Hickie learned the ins and outs of the treasury and made it her job to make them explicit and digestible for the rest of the campaign team. The Republican Party was scrambling to find someone to run against Richards and settled on Allen Clark at the last minute at the urging of Governor Clements. Clark was too late to the game to pose a serious threat. Richards became Treasurer of Texas in 1982 and was easily reelected in 1986 when the Republican Party failed again to produce a viable candidate. As soon as the announcement was made, letters started rolling in letting her know the world of political women was already anticipating her next vertical move.

As 1983 rolled around, Ann was having fun and taking on new adventures. In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro and Walter Mondale were the Democratic nominees for president and vice president. At the Democratic National Convention, Ann made a speech seconding the nomination of Ferraro, and the exposure from that event gave her a bump years later when she would deliver the keynote address at the 1988 Democratic National Convention.

At home, Ann once again had her work cut out for her in a new and unfamiliar position. She had inherited a broken and outdated office with no guidance. Her team sent out questionnaires to every state agency in Texas trying to figure out what the money flow process looked like, how it happened, and how long it should take. The team found the money to be not flowing, not being tracked, and taking an unbelievable amount of time to leave and arrive anywhere. Ann's job was to make it work. And when nearly 500 Texas banks closed because of a major hiccup in the oil and gas industry, she had work on top of work.

THE 1988 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

The 1988 Democratic National Convention clearly signified a change in Ann's career. She was chosen as the keynote speaker, much to the ire of some of the good 'ol boys including fellow Texan Jim Mattox who would later run against her in the Democratic primaries for Governor. The weeks leading up to the convention were troublesome for Ann. She was unsure of herself overall, unsure if she wanted to run for Governor in 1990, despite pressure having become a regular presence in her life, and faced a number of unforeseen logistic challenges including her keynote speech being eaten by a capricious computer just days before the convention. She had been hard on her staff, hardest of all on Suzanne Coleman, and the morale of the team was low. The entire speech was rewritten in Atlanta inside an Omni hotel room as the convention kicked off, and although she told Walter Cronkite beforehand she would be "talking Texan" as if she

meant to, it is possible she did not have time to take the Texas twang out of the speech before delivering it.

Richards' political capital had been growing, and the speech she delivered came across flawlessly and contained some one-liners that quickly became legendary. Richards believed the rhetoric of her keynote speech at the convention set the tone for her campaign for the governorship. Some particularly notable piece included:

I'm delighted to be here with you this evening, because after listening to George Bush all these years, I figured you needed to know what a real Texas accent sounds like...Poor George, he can't help it. He was born with a silver foot in his mouth.

When we pay billions for planes that won't fly, billions for tanks that won't fire, and billions for systems that won't work, that old dog won't hunt. And you don't have to be from Waco to know that when the Pentagon makes crooks rich and doesn't make America strong, that it's a bum deal.

One particularly humorous remark, "Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did. She just did it backwards and in high heels," is one Richards made famous through her keynote speech, but did not originate with her or her team. Richards credits Linda Ellerbee with the line and Ellerbee credits a random passenger on the airplane to Washington D.C. with giving it to her for the speech. The official Ginger Roger website credits Faith Whittlesey with the line, but it actually originated in a 1982 Frank and

Ernest comic. Regardless of the quote's origins, the line signified Richards' commitment to supporting women in politics and her own accomplishments as a public servant that she likely worked harder to achieve than a good ol' boy would have.

THE RACE FOR GOVERNOR

The battle for the Governorship was brutal and two-tiered. Although the fight against Republican nominee William Clayton is often cited as the primary source of nastiness, the Democratic primary nearly broke Richards. Bill Clements, the sitting Governor, decided not to run for a third term in 1990. The Democratic Party and nominee hopefuls had been waiting patiently, although some more patiently than others, and gathering large sums of campaign money while waiting for that announcement. The 1988 Democratic National Convention had effectively launched Ann's political career into a league larger than she had anticipated. Interviews with her closest friends of the time, including Jane Hickie and Suzanne Coleman, confirm that she was still unsure of herself. Richards had a great love of the legislature and the legislative process. Forgoing that love and the opportunity to have easier campaigns running for other offices in the future, including lieutenant governor, was a lot to consider.

Eventually, Richards' friends convinced her to run for Governor. She was poised to do so and had a chance of winning. Women in the Democratic Party had become tired of symbolic campaigns where women ran with very little intention to win. Ann had the unique combination of drive, character, political savvy, experience, and talented friends and supporters to pull her through.

The primary race was bitter before it began. Just before the filing deadline in 1989, Mark White had thrown his name into the race. Ann unexpectedly found herself up against two other Democrats and low on campaign funds. She was the last candidate from either party to air her T.V. commercials, and they were poor in quality and mediocre in messaging. Jim Mattox, the third Democratic hopeful in the race, had money and could afford the top-dollar media advisors of the age. And he took a no-holds-bar approach to campaigning. In January of 1990, after the candidates had announced but still before the race had officially begun, Richards' history with alcohol and drugs was brought to the public's attention via an anonymous letter to small-town editors claiming she was a terrible wife and mother, unfit to be Governor, and known for engaging in bisexual and homosexual behavior.

The second debate of the race was held in Dallas in 1990 and went badly for Ann when she was unable to confront a question about her alcohol and drug abuse directly and was subsequently left far behind White and Mattox in the polls. The campaign team decided to run an ad exposing some of the shadier practices of both White and Mattox during their times in office. The practices, which included accepting bribes, were framed as White and Mattox "lining their pockets" while in office. Ann's campaign team took responsibility for those ads and headlines later, but Jane Hickie insisted they did not regret them because they were true and Ann won the primary because of them.

Clayton Williams, the Republican nominee, naively believed winning the race for Governor against Richards would be inevitable, particularly after the smear campaigns she had endured during the Democratic primaries. Clayton was a pompous die-hard

Aggie from an oil-rich West Texas family that had made themselves unpopular nearly everywhere by exploiting lax water policies and extinguishing Comanche Springs, a popular swimming hole and camping ground in Fort Stockton. Clayton carried on the legacy by never apologizing for his family's actions and making a habit of profiting off the misfortunes of others. He began ruining his own campaign pretty early and it gave Ann a chance to catch her breath after the primaries. Williams knew virtually nothing about politics, policy, or his own campaign. Additionally, he had engaged in tax evasion, publically supported eminent domain, and refused to give up his family's unpopular stances on water rights.

In March of 1990, Williams made his notorious comment comparing dank, foggy, weather to a woman being raped when he said, "Rape is kinda like the weather. If it's inevitable, relax and enjoy it." When reporters prodded him about the comment he lost his temper instead of recanting. Women's groups deserted him, and Barbara Bush saying the president would not waiver in his support did little to help Williams' cause. One month later, Williams was fondly reminiscing, out loud, about the tradition of Aggies being "serviced" by sex workers at the Chicken Ranch in La Grange and other brothels along the border. When asked if he had taken part in such activity, he stupidly replied, "Why, of course."

A few months later, a Dallas Morning News reporter pestered him after he had failed to respond to a questionnaire about six legislative proposals related to crimes of sexual assault, and he snapped at the reporter. A couple of months after that, when

prodded about his choice of verbs when talking about boys' coming of age, he delicately responded with, "I was trying to find a nice, polite term for fucking."

Everything came to a close when Ann and Clayton Williams both appeared at an event before the Dallas Crime Commission. While on Camera, Williams broke away from his friends to go raise his voice at Richards and call her a liar. Ann responded with, "Well, I'm sorry you feel that way about it, Clayton," and extended her hand for the customary handshake. Clayton lost his temper, turned his back to Richards and said, "I don't want to shake your hand." Everything went downhill from there. The Richards campaign team capitalized on the footage-a man who refuses to shake a lady's hand in Texas is not gubernatorial material- and Williams continued to embarrass himself in the media. Anne won the election by a slim margin, and Williams was booed by his fellow good ol' boys when he went on stage to deliver his concession.

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE DOME

Jan Reid describes Ann's time as Governor like a parabola. She had two good years of moving things along and two years of everything starting to crumble. She is remembered as a successful governor because she managed to save the state hundreds of millions of dollars through internal audits, signed the Texas Financial Responsibility Law, increased the quality of prisons into compliance with federal standards, instituted a state Lottery that was redirected in 1997 to the Foundation School Program (FSP), and brought about the Clean Air Act. Exactly half of her appointments were women, and all of her appointments mirrored the racial diversity of Texas at the time. She notably

appointed Ellen Halber, a survivor of a vicious sexual assault, to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, and appointed Barbara Jordan her ethics advisor.

During her last two years as governor, Ann was spread thin. There were some minor problems amongst her own staff and appointees and some major problems with Bob Bullock. Bullock had a tendency to fly off the handle and become physically violent when offended, insulted, or when someone disagreed with him, which was almost constantly. Ann happened to be one of the people who disagreed with Bullock most frequently. Bullock desperately wanted to institute a state income tax to generate revenue and ensure that people who did not live in Texas and did not pay property taxes in Texas, but still made money off of business in Texas, would be fairly taxed. Ann's relationship with Bullock fell apart and became adversarial as Bullock became impossible to reason with on the issue. In addition to her troubles with Bullock, it became clear that as a sitting Governor, if Ann wanted to run for reelection she was going to have to give some responsibility for her campaign up. She did not have the time to be a full-time governor, a full-time fundraiser, and a full-time campaigner.

Ann lost her 1994 election to Bush. She had raised more money and campaigned hard, but her health was starting to catch up with her. She had spent years working into the late early hours of the morning while Bush went home at 5 o'clock every day and let his staff handle the work. Ignoring her epilepsy diagnosis and the beginnings of osteoporosis were not as easy as they had once been. In 1993 Richards vetoed a bill that would have allowed the concealed carry of firearms by citizens in Texas at a time when gang and gun violence were on the minds of many Texans, particularly in Houston and

San Antonio. Additionally, her constitutional amendment to reform education finance in Texas also failed on the ballot that year. In 1994, an unfortunate comment about women being unable to find a gun in their handbags, let alone a tube of lipstick, did not go over well with women or gun-loving Texans and was followed by an equally unfortunate comment at a Girls State event in Austin about the figurative idea of prince charming. The comment belittled the idea of relationships, came off as offensive to both sexes, and felt distinctly anti-family. The comments later seemed minimal compared to Richards' final blow to her own campaign, which came in the form of a disastrous attempt to give five Central Texas waterways to the federal government, which would have caused future development problems for Austin and Travis County.

Richards lost to Bush by 334,066 votes, although she had garnered 91,258 more than she had in 1990. Her concession speech was given at the Hyatt in Austin and was attended by more than a few young women in blue jeans who looked downtrodden, which was quite a contrast to the young men in snappy suits and polished shoes who were reported by *The New Yorker* to resemble puppies bounding around the lobby of the Marriott setting up a victory party for Bush, which allegedly cleared out rather quickly after Bush gave the speech, left, and his attendees went off to more exclusive parties.

The rest of the country was not all together thrilled with the outcome of the night. Although Democrats suffered blows everywhere, things did not go the way anyone expected, even in the Bush camp. Jeb Bush had lost his campaign for governor in Florida after sticking his foot in his mouth during his campaign and saying he would probably do nothing for black voters. While the remark was widely considered honest, it

understandably did nothing to help his campaign. Democrats were swept out of power in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, Hillary Clinton's universal health care bill failed spectacularly, mostly due to mismanagement, and Mario Cuomo, who had been the standing Governor of New York and considered a promising presidential candidate, also lost his race.

Ann floundered for a while. She had no job, no car, no place to live, and \$50,000 in campaign debt. Frito-Lay offered her \$1 million to do a Doritos commercial during the super bowl with Mario Cuomo, which she agreed to. It took about three days to film and during that time Bush was inaugurated back in Austin. After wrapping up, Richards went to see a movie and start the next phase of her life.

Chapter Two: Living Legacy

AFTER OFFICE

Ann never stayed away from politics for too long, even after losing the gubernatorial race. She was an advisor for a time and campaigned for Democrats like John Kerry, a 2004 presidential candidate and the current Secretary of State, although not by handing out bumper stickers and yard signs as she had once done in Dallas. Eventually she settled into advising and fundraising for up-and-coming Texas politicians such as Mark Strama, a former Texas House Representative for the 50th district. After so many years as a public servant, Richards was determined to continue her career, and although she had suffered defeat, she was still widely considered one of the most powerful Democrats in the country. So she continued to support talented candidates and smart policies. And she never stopped speaking up for women. When asked if she was satisfied with the progress made by American women in her lifetime, Ann replied, “Oh, I am hardly satisfied. I am outraged most of the time at how progress seems to stall.”

Between the time Richards left office in 1994 and died at age 73 in 2006, she had solidified her reputation as a revolutionary political force mostly through public speaking. Countless articles and entire books have analyzed Richards’ rhetoric and its impact on every female politician since her reign as Texas Governor. Curiously, there has been far less written on the impact of her administration’s priorities and the policies she established during her time in office. More has been written about what she accomplished in the ten years since she died, but research on the impacts of her policies is scarce. This

chapter will touch some of the policy areas Richards impacted, and while there are some facts and figures available to illustrate her accomplishments, the impact of her work and time in office is still largely speculation by friends and fans of Richards who have sought to record, but not necessarily analyze, her life and work.

HEALTH

Alcoholism

Richards often spoke publically about her relationship with sobriety and Alcoholics Anonymous, even in her political speeches and addresses. Richards quit drinking and went through a rehabilitation program in 1980 after her friends and family held an emotional intervention to confront her about her addiction. After leaving the rehabilitation facility and returning to her life as a public servant in Texas, Richards never covered up her alcoholism and was once quoted saying, “I like to tell people alcoholism is one of my strengths.” The last 26 years of her life were spent sober. As a friend Richards helped members of her inner circle through the process of becoming sober, and as governor she created treatment programs inside prisons for inmates who were struggling with substance use and addiction.

Richards’ willingness to speak publically about her sobriety and struggles with alcoholism are perhaps considered so revolutionary because alcoholism is often seen as a lack of control by the person. Alcoholism was not spoken about widely in the 1980s and 1990s when Richards held office, and generally was not considered a struggle women faced. Her willingness to face it directly and openly made space for others to do the same

and laid groundwork for later implementing treatment programs in prisons for inmates who were struggling with addiction in addition to being ensnared by the criminal justice system.

Osteoporosis

In 1996, osteoporosis was on Richards' mind. Her mother, Mildred Iona "Ona" Willis, had already been diagnosed with the disease and Richards was in the process of moving her into assisted living. About this time, Richards noticed that her clothes were not fitting as well as they once had and it occurred to her that she may have been shrinking. After breaking her hand while walking around Town Lake with her daughter Ellen in Austin, Richards asked her doctor for a bone density test.

In 1994, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a set of guidelines of average measurements for post-menopausal women, now known as T-scores. Those measurements are still used today. Unfortunately, the measurements only apply after a woman has gone through menopause, and a woman can lose 30% of her bone mass in the first five years after menopause if she never seeks medical treatment for menopause symptoms and is referred for a bone density test by a physician. This is one of the reasons Richards partnered with Richard U. Levine, MD to write *I'm Not Slowing Down: Winning My Battle with Osteoporosis* in 2003.

In addition to sharing details about her own journey of being diagnosed and treating her symptoms in the book, Richards and Levine outline important details for women with osteoporosis to be aware of including a table of the WHO T-scores, who is

eligible for Medicare reimbursement under the Bone Measurement Act, factors that increase vulnerability to osteoporosis, and ways to combat the onset of osteoporosis and treat it once it has been diagnosed.

Richards stressed the importance of understanding osteoporosis as a disease that everyone, not just older women, is vulnerable to. She wanted to communicate the message that staying active and building bone density is of the utmost importance and used her book as a user-friendly platform to do so. Unfortunately, Richards passed away three years after the book was written, and because there has been no follow-up, it is not possible to say what impact the book has made. It would be interesting to know if the rate of bone density screenings increased as a result of the book's publication, but research on the subject would be necessary to say for certain.

Cancer

Richards died in September of 2006 after a six-month battle with esophagus cancer. Cancer in the upper esophagus, the type Richards had, is linked to heavy smoking and drinking. Richards was honest about her smoking and drinking habits and said she “smoked like a chimney and drank like a fish” when she was young. Esophagus cancer is considered a silent killer and many people never discover they have it until the prognosis is poor. Although Richards had not been drinking or smoking for the last two decades of her life, she had never had a screening for esophagus cancer either. Her death, which was seen by many as untimely, raised the question about whether esophagus cancer screenings should become more commonplace, particularly for older adults who are more

likely to have begun smoking and drinking before the health outcomes were as well researched and documented as they are now.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Prisons

Richards inherited a broken and complicated prison system when she took the Governor's Office in 1991. In 1972, the Texas prison system got caught up in the federal court case *Ruiz v. Estelle* when it was ruled that Texas had violated the eighth and fourteenth amendments, which meant Texas was in trouble for subjecting prisoners to cruel and unusual punishment and failing to ensure due process and equal protection under the law due to overcrowding, poor medical care, and violence and torture from the prison guards. Texas prisons were full to bursting, and to comply with the rulings of the court case Ann's predecessor, Bill Clements, who was no advocate for criminal justice reform, had to quietly order the Board of Pardons and Paroles to release approximately 750 inmates each week. The state had developed a habit of leaving convicted criminals in the county jails for too long instead of transferring them to state penitentiaries. When Richards took office, Harris County was leading a multi-county lawsuit against the state over its costly failure to assume responsibility for convicts and move them to state prisons and out of county jails.

Propelled by lawsuits, Richards and the legislature embarked on the largest prison construction project the country had ever seen. Richards promised the construction of prisons with enough space for 27,000 new beds on top of the 12,000 that had been built

during the Clements administration. By 1996, more than 70,00 additional beds had been added to the prison system in Texas. That year the system had capacity for 128,000 inmates, which was more than twice what it had been when Ann took the Governors' Office in 1991. In 2000, Texas was projected to have the largest prison population of any Western democracy. One out of every twenty-one adults were in prison, compared to one in fifty-eight in 1982.

Richards was considered "tough on crime," a popular motto of the time. She supported capital punishment and more prisoners, forty-eight, were executed in her time as governor than during the administrations of her predecessors. But she understood that crime does not happen in a vacuum and refused to turn a blind eye to the cycles prisoners were susceptible to, as Clements had done. Ann was a recovering alcoholic and understood clearly that 80-85% of Texas prisoners had convictions that were drug or alcohol related and that they were still managing to get high and drunk in prison. It seemed unlikely to her that inmates could be expected to stay sober and hold down any of the handful of jobs available to them with criminal records while struggling with addiction.

In 1991, Senate Bill 828, the first bill establishing therapeutic treatment programs, passed out of the legislature and went to Ann to be signed into law. The law established a series of initiatives, including those that developed the In-Prison Therapeutic Communities and the Substance Abuse Felony Punishment (SAFP) program. The legislative accomplishment of establishing treatment programs in prison, and later programs for those on probation or parole was a great source of pride for Richards. She

saw the never-ending cycle of crime and addiction and believed wholeheartedly that these therapeutic programs were a step towards ending that cycle.

Richards has since been criticized for expanding the prison system so greatly and inadvertently laying the groundwork for the privatization of prisons in Texas, which criminal justice advocates and budget conscious legislators are starting to see as costly to the state both socially and financially. However, it is not possible to prove if the privatization of prisons was fueled by the creation of more prisons, the “tough on crime” attitude of the age, or some combination of factors. It cannot be said with any certainty that Richards was not a contributing factor to the privatization of the prison industrial complex, but it seems unlikely that the set of circumstances she inherited from her predecessors contributed nothing to moving the state in that direction. More research could illustrate the combination of factors that contributed to the challenge caused by the prison industrial complex and perhaps shed some light on how best to dismantle it.

Gun Control

Richards was not anti-gun by any means, but she was an advocate for smarter gun control policies. She supported proposals to reduce the sale of semi-automatic firearms in Texas and in 1993 she vetoed a bill that would have allowed private citizens to carry concealed handguns. Richards believed her stance on gun control to be sensible, even in Texas, and often made harsh remarks about her opponents views that came off as ridicule, which many believe contributed to her losing the 1994 election. The concealed

carry handgun bill was later passed by the state legislature and signed by Governor Bush in 1995.

Sodomy Laws

When the Texas criminal code came up for revision in 1993, Richards favored eliminating the criminal ban on "sodomy" in Texas law. Richards had openly embraced gay supporters in her 1990 run for governor and made it clear that she opposed discrimination against gays and interference in people's private lives. The proposed criminal code revision Richards sent to the legislature eliminated the "sodomy" ban, but they reinstated it over her objections.

It is believed that Richards reluctantly signed the bill believing that vetoing it would not have accomplished anything. The sodomy law already in existence would have remained as it was and a veto would have eliminated other progressive improvements in the code. Democrats controlled the legislature in 1993, but Republicans were a strong minority. The Democratic-controlled State Senate sided with Richards in voting to eliminate the ban. The Democratic-controlled House voted 75-50 to retain the ban, but almost all the 50 progressive votes came from Democrats, with Republicans almost unanimously (together with some conservative Democrats) providing the bulk of the homophobic votes. Jane Nelson, a Republican who is now a senator and chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, was the leading voice opposing the decriminalization of gay sex.

In the 1994 governor's race, George W. Bush criticized Richards' support for decriminalizing gay sex. Ann maintained her support for decriminalization and Bush declared that he would veto any bill to decriminalize gay sex, because he believed it important to keep on the books a "symbolic" statement against homosexuality. Bush's gay baiting likely contributed to his defeat of Richards in the election.

Richards, was the first and only governor in Texas history to consistently take a pro-gay stance. She was also the first and only Texas governor to appoint openly gay people to offices in her campaign and administration, including Glen Maxey her protégé and supporter who represented the 51st district in the Texas House of Representatives from 1991-2003.

THE ENVIRONMENT

When Richards was Governor, every major city in the State of Texas was experiencing critical levels of air pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency listed Texas as the worst toxic air polluter in the country. Air pollution was putting Texans at risk and cities in risk of violating the Clean Air Act, which could have led to Texas being cut off from desperately needed federal highway funds. The land commissioner at the time, Gary Mauro, had proposed alternative fuel programs, which Richards supported enthusiastically. She particularly liked his plan for using compressed natural gas as a motor fuel, which could help urban areas reduce air pollution caused by traffic, and his legislation for protecting coastal regions from oil spills. Additionally, Richards wanted to

shut what she believed to be a revolving door between regulatory officials and cushy jobs in the industries, like oil and gas, which they had been charged with regulating.

Richards stirred up some controversy in her first two years as governor when she called on the Water Commission and Air Control Board to establish a two-year moratorium on permits for new commercial hazardous waste incinerators, cement kilns, and injection wells involving salt dome. She felt strongly that hazardous waste facilities were getting too close to residential areas, schools, and water supplies throughout the state.

Richards was an environmentalist before the word became mainstream. Even in her first elected office as Travis County Commissioner she was committed to working with environmental coalitions and developers in the interest of protecting the State of Texas and its residents. Although her stance on protecting the environment and proactively combatting pollution and hazardous waste dumping is well known, it is unclear what impact her administration had on future administrations and the Democratic Party in Texas. More research and analysis could identify what trends came of her commitment to the environment and the long-term impact it resulted in.

EDUCATION

The Texas Lottery

Richards advocated for the establishment of a lottery in Texas to supplement school finances. In 1991, Texas voters approved an amendment to the Texas Constitution allowing the sale of lottery tickets across the state. The Texas Lottery's first game was the

scratch-off ticket Lone Star Millions, and the first ticket was sold to Governor Richards at Polk's Feed Store in Oak Hill in Austin. First-day sales of 23.2 million tickets set a world record. The lottery proceeds were redirected to the Foundation School Program (FSP) in 1997. The FSP ensures that all school districts, regardless of property wealth, receive "substantially equal access to similar revenue per student at similar tax effort."

The Robin Hood Plan

School finance was a key issue in the Richards administration and remained a key issue for her successors. The famous "Robin Hood Plan," as the media named it, was launched in the 1992–1993 biennium with the goal of making school funding more equitable across school districts in the state, which Richards supported. The law was enacted in response to the state Supreme Court's decision in *Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby*. The Supreme Court sided with the Edgewood plaintiffs, who had claimed discrimination against students in poor school districts. The court found the school financing system in Texas based only on property taxes to be unconstitutional and ordered the state legislature to implement a more equitable school financing system by the 1990–1991 school year. The Texas Legislature proposed two attempts to the courts that were thrown out before the third attempt was accepted by the court and made law in 1993. The law "recaptured" property tax revenue from property-wealthy school districts and distributed those in property-poor districts, in an effort to equalize the financing of all school districts throughout Texas.

Curriculum

Richards was wary of education standardization in a state as large as Texas and the possibility of teachers across the state becoming what she called “Austin-controlled robots.” She believed in “site based management,” or decentralizing control over the education system and giving control back to the districts and individual campuses across the state. George W. Bush has said publically that he decided to run for governor after hearing Ann speak about her education plan and consequently having his first ideas about what would eventually become the controversial No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. In 2015, Congress stripped away all of NCLB’s national features after harsh criticism of its failure from the left, right, and center, and replaced it with the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 that turned all remnants of the program over to the states.

Teaching

Richards passed on her legacy in part through teaching. She obtained her teaching certificate from The University of Texas at Austin in 1955. Arguably, she used her teaching background at the end of her career more than at the beginning. Richards taught social studies and history at Fulmore Junior High School in Austin from 1954 to 1957, but did not return to teaching until 1997 when she served as the Fred and Rita Richman Distinguished Visiting Professor of Politics at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. In 1998 she was elected a trustee of Brandeis University and was reelected in 2004. She held the position until her death in 2006. In the fall semester of

2005, Richards taught a class called "Women and Leadership" at The University of Texas at Austin to twenty-one female students.

The Ann Richards School

The Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders is a public school in the Austin Independent School District for intellectually gifted young women in grades 6-12. The school opened in 2007 and provides a challenging, college-preparatory curriculum with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) skills. The school uses project-based, experiential learning to enhance real-world application, and the curriculum includes collaborative projects within the community to explore career options. Students graduate on the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP), the most demanding set of high school graduation requirements in Texas. In 2015 the *Washington Post* ranked the Ann Richards School as one of the most challenging schools in the country at #19.

Governor Richards was actively involved in developing the school's vision before her death. The school was founded to provide young women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds the skills and confidence necessary to pursue college educations and careers. Today it stands as one of the largest single-gender public schools in the nation and a tribute to the legacy of Ann Richards.

GROWING WOMEN LEADERS

To those who knew Richards, and to many who did not, the opening of the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders came with little surprise. Richards always took a chance on other women, and much of what has been written about her administration and her inner circle emphasizes this. Sarah Weddington, her one and only boss in politics, took a chance on Richards, and Richards paid that forward throughout her entire time in office. She looked for talent and passion in her team and never lost confidence that the right woman could teach herself anything about Texas politics and policy and put it to better use than a man. She was never afraid of her connection to feminism and the feminists around her. And remarkably, she never viewed other women as her competition. The relationships she cultivated with Sarah Weddington, Hillary Clinton, Barbara Jordan, and Lady Bird Johnson before, during, and after her time as governor continue to be a lasting reminder that women can make enormous change in politics, and it does not have to be through squeezing oneself into the leftover mold of a good ol' boy.

GROWING THE LEGACY

In the ten years since Ann Richards passed away there has been consistent interest in her life and her place in history, but her legacy is still difficult to identify. In some cases, as with the Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders, her legacy can be clearly observed and quantified in the number of young women who pass through the doors and the accomplishments they take with them when they leave. In other ways we

are still waiting for the legacy to take shape. Richards held elected offices from 1982 to 1994 and achieved more than many, even her devout supporters, thought possible. Yet the impact of her work, particularly her policy work, has been largely unexplored. It is possible that the process of examination is still underway. The most comprehensive and detailed writing on Richards is Jan Reid's *Let The People In: The Life and Times of Ann Richards*, which The University of Texas Press did not release until 2012. Despite the possibility of research on her life and work being held up in the pipeline, it is curious that a fair amount of academic research has already been published on the administrations of Clements, Richards' predecessor, and Bush, her successor. George Bush continuing his journey into politics and later becoming President of the United States makes his time as governor part of a larger narrative. As a nation we have come to expect thorough analysis of our presidents and their impacts, often before they ever leave office, and the extensive body of writing on Bush was expected. However, Bill Clements, who did not continue to a higher office, has also been researched by academics to a greater degree than Richards. The body of knowledge on Clements and his administration are not as comprehensive as those of Bush, but there have been multiple studies and analyses conducted on the impact he made on the prison industrial complex, judicial reform, school finance, and management of Texas coastlines. By comparison, Richards' work and impact on policy and legislation, particularly in the realms of education and criminal justice, has largely been only documented and summarized.

Another potential reason for the gap in analysis is the possibility that Richards' single term as governor is not considered long enough to have made a substantial impact

on public policy compared to those who served longer, including Clements and Bush. A single term is unusual for a Texas governor, and because two years of her four-year term are often described as the downward slope in a parabola, she could be seen as an unsuccessful governor. I would argue that her twelve years in elected office and cumulative political and policymaking experience provide a rich body of work to explore and analyze that has been left untapped.

It cannot be ignored that the simple fact that Richards was a woman elected to public office could be responsible for the lag in academic consideration of her administration's impact. Richards was the first Texas woman to crack the glass ceiling by being elected to the governor's office, and it is not a secret that her feminist following helped her get there. I would argue that her ability to crack the glass ceiling in Texas in 1990, and the feminist following she cultivated, are also noteworthy accomplishments that deserve further exploration. Identifying the set of factors that came together to support the formation of that feminist following and the features within the political landscape that aligned when Richards was elected could provide valuable insights into how female politicians who are currently campaigning can obtain elected offices in states like Texas.

The existing body of literature is unusually focused on Richards' rhetoric. Surface level searches in both mainstream search engines such as Google and academic databases such as JSTOR result in pages of links to news articles, books, biographies, and reviews that contain a little bit of information on who Richards was and what she accomplished, but quite a bit more on how she spoke. Her wit, sense of humor, drawl, twang, and way

of talkin' Texan, speaking plain, or shootin' straight captivated the state and the nation. Nearly everything that has been written on her includes some sort of commentary on her rhetoric regardless of the work's larger theme. What is noteworthy is that all of the commentary fails to identify any way in which Richards' rhetoric was unique. She was not the first person to speak the way she did. Indeed, many Texans found her diction and rhetoric familiar and relatable. She was also not the last Texas governor to speak as she did. George Bush and Rick Perry were both mocked by national media outlets for speaking with twangs and drawls and for their use of idioms while in office. Perhaps the combination of Richards' gender, her Texas upbringing, and her politics is what resulted in the literature's obsession with her rhetoric. Whatever the reason is, there seems to be a hindrance in moving past how she spoke to analyzing her policy work that does her legacy a disservice and deserves closer examination.

Conclusion

Ann Richards changed public policy, politics, and Texas. She's often referred to as a champion, a pioneer, and a game changer. She continued to be a democratic leader long after she left office. Yet, her legacy is still difficult to ascertain. There are questions that are currently unasked and unanswered. I propose that asking questions with the intent to identify connections between Richards' work and current public policies and politics could be a catalyst for pushing past the existing plateau of summaries. Moving the body of knowledge forward, and generating something deeper than a long list of accomplishments will allow future scholars to continue growing and shaping her legacy.

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